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UNCLAS HARARE 000250

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/PDPA FOR DALTON, MITCHELL AND SIMS
NSC FOR JENDAYI FRAZER
LONDON FOR GURNEY
PARIS FOR NEARY
NAIROBI FOR PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL KPAQ KMDR ZI

SUBJECT: TWO JOURNALISTS ARRESTED AT TSVANGIRAI TRIAL,
OTHERS BARRED

¶1. Two journalists were arrested outside of Harare's High Court on February 3 as they sought entrance into the court to cover the opening day of opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai's treason trial. The two journalists, Daily News Deputy News Editor Pedzisayi Ruhanya and freelance journalist Ishmael Mafundikwa, were charged with violating Section 17 of the Public Order and Security Act. Section 17 deals with inciting or participating in public violence. The two remain in police custody on February 4 but, according to relatives, have not been mistreated. Mr. Mafundikwa's lawyer hopes her client will have a hearing on February 4.

¶2. Police initially barred all non-government journalists from court. Reporters from government-owned print and electronic media were given access. After an urgent request by the defense lawyers, presiding judge Paddington Garwe ruled that the trial must be "held in public" and "interested parties should be allowed in court unless they are barred by the court." After the judge's ruling, only those journalists with valid press cards issued under the controversial Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). This still amounted to a partial ban on non-government media as most foreign correspondents and journalists from the independent media have yet to receive accreditation.

¶3. In the chaotic scene outside of the court before the trial began, American journalist Andrew Meldrum (has permanent resident status in Zimbabwe) was pushed and shoved by police and hit over the head with a police baton. Mr. Meldrum told Embassy officer that he was not seriously hurt.

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